FOR REFERENCE ONLY

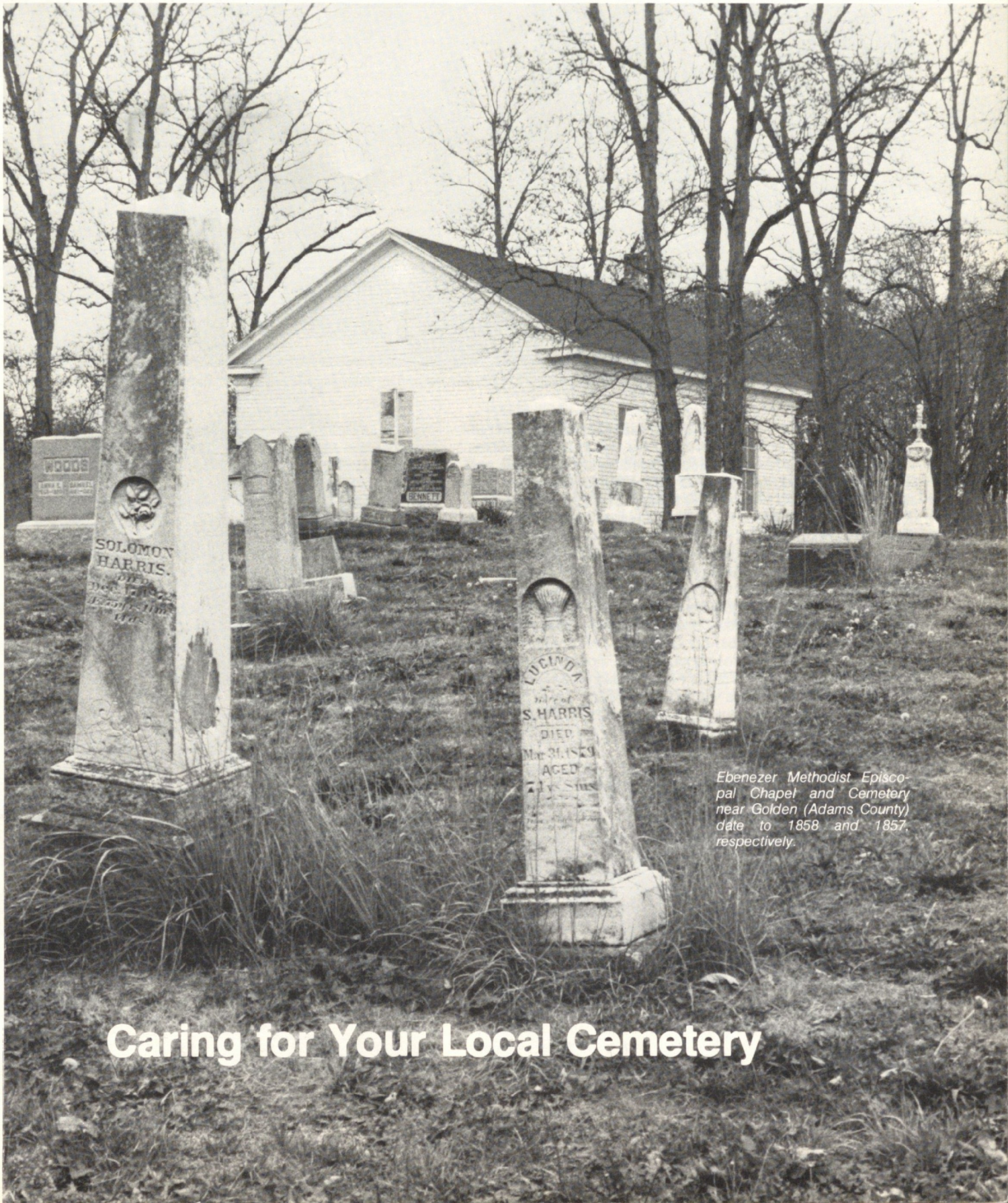
INDIANA COLLECTION

Cemeteries

ILLINOIS PRESERVATION SERIES

ILLINOIS HISTORIC PRESERVATION AGENCY
DIVISION OF PRESERVATION SERVICES

NUMBER 9



Ebenezer Methodist Episcopal Chapel and Cemetery near Golden (Adams County) date to 1858 and 1857, respectively.

Caring for Your Local Cemetery

Pleasant Grove Cemetery in Peoria County is a well-maintained burial ground with an impressive collection of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century tombstones.

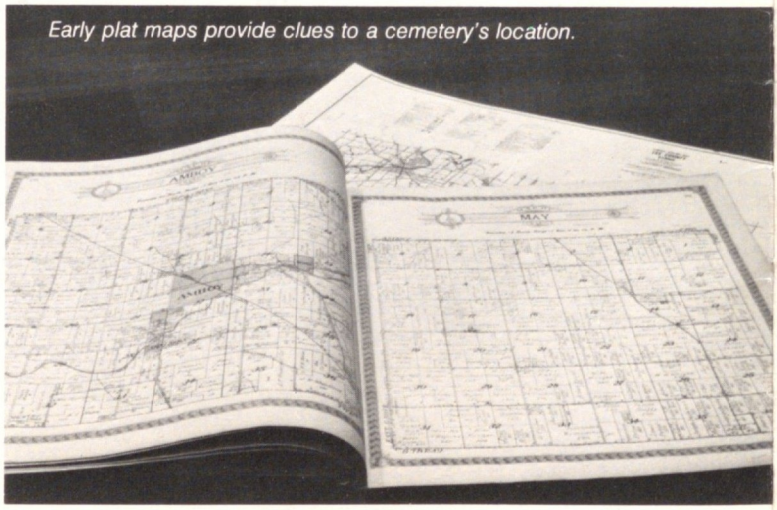
Cemeteries provide a unique view of an area's history and culture. From small family plots to park-like suburban cemeteries, they silently tell the story of a place's settlement, population, and sometimes, decline. Interwoven are the individuals whose tombstones provide bare hints of their lives, family connections, and deaths. Cemeteries are by nature commemorative; they are meant to recall the past.

Preserving those mirrors of time involves varying amounts of care and maintenance. Sometimes abandoned or neglected cemeteries are reclaimed with much effort from brush and dirt, while those once overlooked are rediscovered by genealogists, relatives, or students of local history. While enthusiasm may be the greatest asset a would-be cemetery preservationist can possess, knowledge is surely close behind. How does one handle simple repairs? When should a professional be consulted? What will best preserve the work already done? Some answers you will find in this brief guide. Other answers and new questions will emerge as you begin your work.

Documenting A Cemetery

Locating and recording a cemetery are important first steps in its preservation. Documenting a cemetery requires several types of research. Before a project is complete, the researcher often has become geographer, photographer, and artist. Though the job seems a tough one to fill, correct tools and polished research skills will contribute greatly to the accuracy and completeness of your work. A study of your area's geography and pattern of settlement is the first step in documenting a cemetery: consult local histories, legal abstracts, and maps for information on a cemetery's location and history. Most cemeteries can be located on county maps or atlases. Maps and atlases for a particular county are almost always available in public libraries. Many atlases dating from the late 1800s are housed in the Illinois State Historical Library in Springfield. Examine maps closely and compare several maps made over a period of years. As you locate smaller graveyards and private family cemeteries, patterns of settlement emerge. Comparisons of old and new maps will illustrate the growth and development of population centers and transportation routes, which often account for both the appearance and disappearance of cemeteries. County highway maps and topographical maps that show existing cemeteries in relation to modern roads are very useful.

Illinois cemeteries are often found on slight rises. At higher elevations, cemeteries are removed from routine farming activities and made safe from high water. This pattern is particularly evident in southern Illinois and holds true to most of central and



Early plat maps provide clues to a cemetery's location.

Veronica Taylor, author of Caring For Your Local Cemetery, *coordinated the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency's Illinois Cemetery Project from December 1986 to March 1988.*

northern Illinois. In the central Illinois plains, cemeteries are often marked by pine and cedar trees, which were popular plantings in family grave lots. Hedgerows and shrubs may also identify a burial site, since they were commonly used as cemetery boundary lines.

Genealogical and local historical societies frequently have standing committees devoted to compiling data from tombstones; often they publish their compilations or otherwise make them available to the public. Old obituaries can provide some clues to the location of family burial sites, and farmers often are a good source of information because they are familiar with the physical features of their farmland. Legal abstracts provide exact dimensions and legal descriptions of cemeteries, which can be used to confirm their location. A case in point is a Peoria County cemetery whose location was based on hearsay but confirmed by the abstract.

Plotting the Physical Features

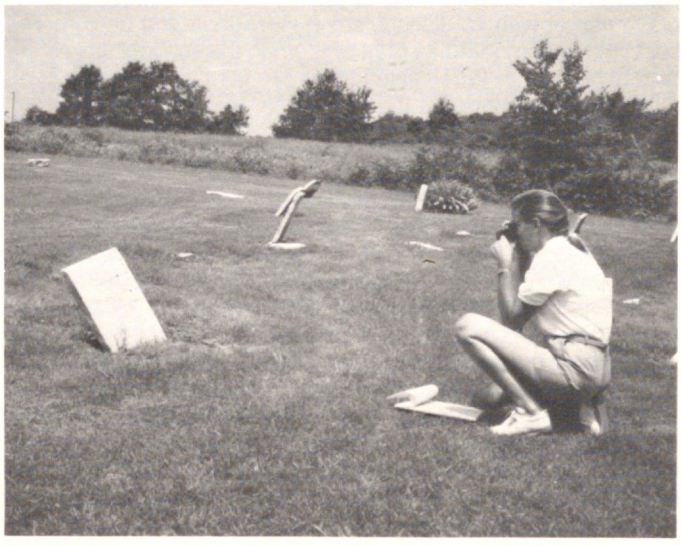
If the cemetery is on private land, you should obtain the owner's permission before beginning the work of documenting the position of tombstones, prominent vegetation, the size and boundaries of the cemetery, and any unusual features. Transcribing the engraving on tombstones should be done completely and accurately. Writing exactly what you see and recording the inscriptions line-for-line will aid researchers. Errors by stonecarvers should be transcribed exactly. Team work is necessary to ensure accuracy. Studying the styles of the carved letters on well-preserved stones may help you to decipher the inscriptions on broken or chipped stones. One common transcription mistake is confusing numbers and letters; for example, mistaking a *4* for a *1* or an *8* for a *3*. Distinguishing months and foreign languages is also important. Transcribing is a time consuming task but do not rush your work; compromising will only make your information incomplete and inaccurate. Some engravings will be illegible due to weathering. In cases where there is no visible inscription, thoroughly describe the stone. Also note the location of field stones (which were often used as footstones), mounds, and depressions of possible burial sites. If an inscription is worn, as is frequently the case with many white marble markers, a rubbing of paper and chalk may enhance the inscription.

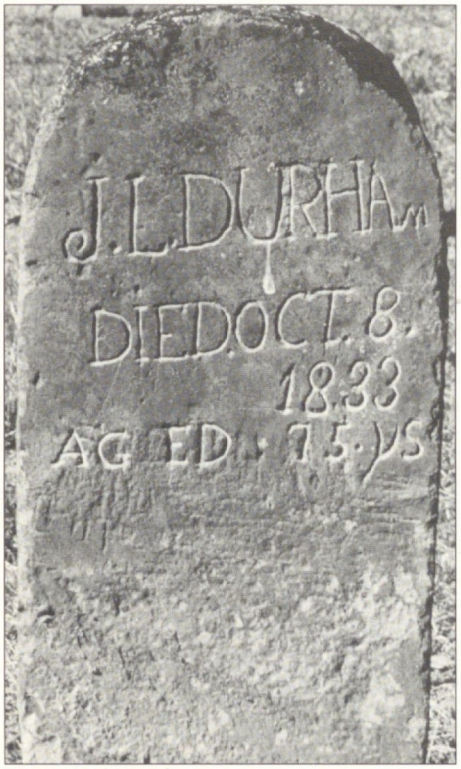
Gravestone rubbing may provide readable inscriptions. The materials are simple and few—rice paper and a soft, non-oil black chalk. But you must work carefully. Taping the paper to the tombstone is a delicate task, particularly if the stone is deteriorated. Leaning or holding the stone may cause it to snap or chip. Practice first on a well-preserved stone to understand the process and care needed to safely rub older, weathered stones. The raised surface will be recorded in black, while the background remains white. Though actual-size rubbings are difficult to store and use, they are very informative.

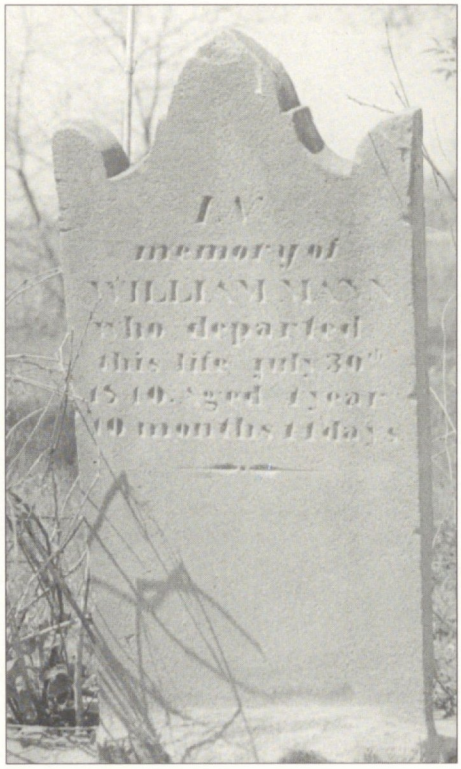
Family plots are sometimes nestled in small stands of trees. Be alert for cemeteries obscured by vegetation or groves of trees.

Cedar trees are familiar graveyard landmarks. Hedgerows and shrubs, which often form a cemetery's boundaries, are also common.

Cemeteries can be quickly documented with photographs when transcriptions are impracticable. For best results, photographs should be taken in full sunlight.







Left: This Saline County sandstone marker, dated 1833, is in remarkably good condition. Center: A more sophisticated sandstone marker, this one dated 1840, was carved for a grave in Sangamon County. Right: Marble was the most popular choice for gravestones in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Marble is identifiable by its sparkling crystals, which become visible as the finish deteriorates.

A plat of the graveyard should be made when transcriptions are complete. Number each tombstone on graph paper to indicate its position. Matching those numbers to inscriptions will illustrate the position of burial and family groupings.

If time is a major concern, document a cemetery quickly and accurately with photographs. Photography documents motifs, symbols, lettering styles, inscriptions, and tablet designs. It is helpful to develop a uniform and organized collection. You will need a 35mm camera, black and white film, and a light meter. Black and white film rated ASA 125 has a fine grain for reproduction yet it is fast enough for handheld exposure. Black and white film is also archivally stable; the image will remain intact for many years. Photos should be taken at eye level with the stone, so kneeling or lying on the ground may be necessary. A light meter will calculate the exposure needed to photograph a gravemarker with its distinguishing inscription and design. The best time to photograph a marker is when the sunlight strikes the face of the stone. When inscriptions are faint or weathered, you may want to photograph the rubbing for your file.

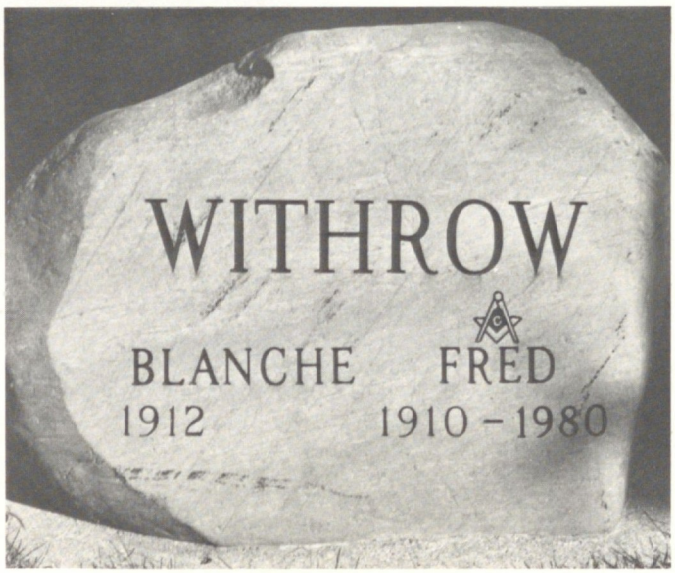
Types of Stone

Determining the site of your local cemetery by its legal descriptive location, transcribing tombstones, and researching local history is only the beginning. Since stone weathers at differing rates, identifying types of stones and determining appropriate methods for preservation are important steps in caring for a cemetery.

Fieldstone, a nondescript local stone, was sometimes used for headstones, but more commonly for footstones. When used as a burial marker, fieldstone ordinarily is engraved only with a simple motif or initials. Fieldstone withstands weathering to a considerable degree. Because fieldstones may at first appear randomly placed in a cemetery, carefully plot and inventory their locations for future reference.

Marble was the most popular gravestone material in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Engravers found marble easy to carve, and it could be polished to create a high sheen. A soft and fragile material, its use today is discouraged because it deteriorates rapidly in modern environmental conditions. Although marble is available in a wide range of colors, markers constructed of it are usually white. Smooth and legible when polished, marble becomes grainy and hard to read with the passage of time. Marble is identifiable by its sparkling crystals, which become visible after the surface polish has deteriorated.

A sophisticated fieldstone marker, the face of the rock was smoothed before the inscription was carved.



Above: Locally quarried slate was sometimes used for tombstones in southern Illinois. This unusual monument is located in Woodlawn Cemetery in Carbondale (Jackson County). (Photo by William G. Farrar) Right: The empty chair was a popular nineteenth-century monument subject. This one is of carved limestone, a material heavily used for funerary sculpture a century ago.

Limestone was readily available throughout Illinois in the nineteenth century and was a common choice for gravestones. Limestone is a sedimentary rock with color varying from white to black, but more commonly grey. Limestone was heavily used for funerary sculpture, but because of its delicate sand and lime composition, it is not widely used today.

Gravestones fashioned from slate and sandstone were far less common than those of marble or limestone. Slate, known as greenstone and quarried in southern Illinois, is a fine-grain metamorphic rock. The dark brown or dark green is extremely stable. In the early 1800s, most slate markers were highly decorated and inscribed, making it an excellent subject for gravestone rubbing. Greenstone was rarely used in northern Illinois and is seldom used today for gravestones.

Sandstone, as the word implies, is a sedimentary rock consisting of sand. Sandstone appears in brown, tan, and white depending on the silica that binds it. Like limestone, sandstone deteriorates rapidly. Consequently, though many sandstone markers from the 1800s still stand today, frequently their inscriptions have been worn away.

Granite, a stable igneous stone, became a popular choice for tombstones in the late 1800s and is the stone most widely used for markers today. It is found in a wide range of colors—black, grey, pink, red, and white—and is prized for its durability and ease of engraving. Almost any century-old cemetery will contain a majority of granite tombstones.

Gravestones are made of a variety of materials. This homemade marker, of poured cement, is located in Dunkard-Sugar Creek Cemetery, in Sangamon County.

Weathering

Weathering is a natural process of the interaction of the atmosphere and a rock's composition. Water, oxygen, and carbon dioxide all figure in the weathering process. There are two types of weathering, physical and chemical. Physical weathering of tombstones includes ice wedging, sheeting, plant root wedging, and excessive heating and cooling. Ice wedging occurs when water freezes and expands inside the marker and fragments break off. Similarly, the stone is broken into layers or sheets through freezing and thawing in a process called sheeting. Plant roots growing in the natural crevices of the stone may break fragments or sheets (plant-root wedging) away from the main body of the marker. The burning of prairie grass is also harmful to markers. Heat from the fire, followed by rapid cooling, flakes limestone or sandstone markers and fractures granite tombstones.

Chemical weathering is the slow decay of a stone's composition due to pollution or carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Mixed with fog, rain, or snow, carbon dioxide develops into carbonic acid, otherwise known as acid rain. Lichen, algae, and moss

Left: Vines are unsightly and obscure the inscriptions on tombstones, but tombstone conservators don't agree on their removal. Some claim that removing the vines leads to cracks that harm the stone. Right: Lichen, moss, and algae can be removed from tombstones with a 25% solution of ammonia and water. Spray it on and scrub gently with a natural bristle brush.

also attack stone by holding water on the outside of the stone that is absorbed to the interior. Marble is most susceptible to chemical weathering.

Oxidation is a chemical process that breaks down stones composed of iron. Granite is particularly susceptible to oxidation, which causes stains on its surface. Yet granite is the most stable of tombstones, and the staining is not comparable to the deleterious effect it has on marble, limestone, and sandstone markers.

Water combined with air, fog, and wind will disintegrate a stone over a period of time. Sedimentary stones like sandstone and limestone will lose their shape and carved design; square corners will become round and carvings illegible. Marble striates after the polish has worn.

Your cemetery research may lead you to uncover buried markers. Probing for such markers should be part of a general clean-up effort. Use a thin metal rod to probe the ground. Usually, markers that are unearthed are in excellent condition. There are, however, conflicting opinions about unearthing buried markers. Some think that stones are best unearthed and reset; others think they are best preserved below ground where they are less prone to weathering.

Repairs and Maintenance

Though physical and chemical weathering is inevitable, there are techniques to improve and preserve the appearance of gravestones. The cleaning and restoration of tombstones should be approached with great care; it is wise to consult an expert. Monument dealers often have information on repair or may know of an experienced stone conservator.

To reset a tilted stone, first carefully lift the marker and set it aside. It is not necessary to enlarge the hole; a mixture of compacted earth and gravel will hold the stone upright. Place brick fragments or gravel at the bottom to drain excess water and prevent leaching. The same technique should be used to reset a broken tablet, but care must be taken to preserve the inscription. Split and cracked tombstones are commonly repaired with metal supports, cement, and adhesives.

Metal rods and brackets are sometimes used to support markers; however, metal will rust and eventually stain the stone, making the inscription and design illegible. Stone and metal expand and contract at different rates. Frequent freezing and

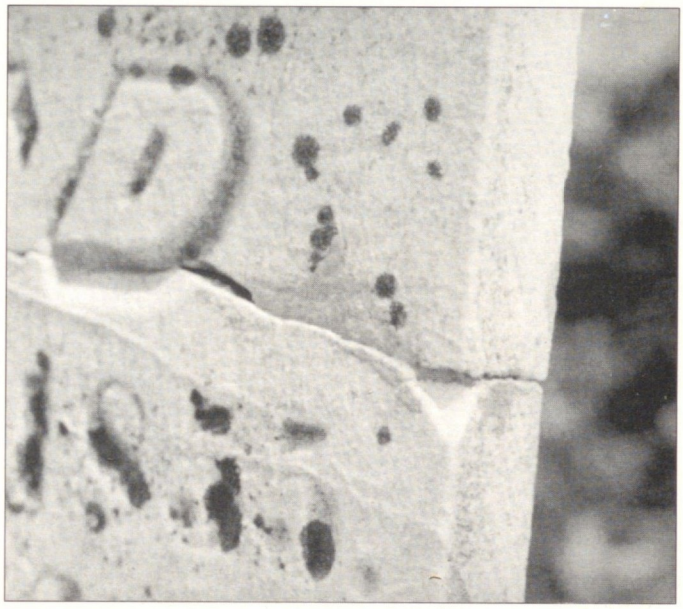
Weathering, both physical and chemical, obliterates inscriptions and slowly destroys tombstones. Sandstone markers, like the one above, are particularly susceptible to weathering.

Above: This limestone marker is being eroded by ice wedging; water seeps into cracks, expands when it freezes, and forces the stone apart. Right: The iron rods that originally supported this tombstone have rusted.

thawing creates internal pressure, and the pressure of metal rods against the stone eventually causes additional fractures and fragments.

Cement repair is a relatively inexpensive method of resetting and rejoining fragments of grave markers. Resetting stones in cement is not recommended because the process is irreversible. When cement is used to rejoin fragments, care should be taken to keep the overall design and inscription intact. Cement reacts to the environment differently than marble, limestone, and sandstone. When set in cement, markers may snap off where the stone meets the cement. Cementitious acrylic-based adhesives may be used to connect fractures and fragments to the main body of a marker. Careful application of adhesives is necessary to limit running and staining. Adhesives are often used in combination with nylon rods that are used to connect large fragments of stone.

Applying concealed rods is the work of a professional stone conservator. This method is derived from a cabinetmaking technique called blind pinning. First, the broken piece is cleaned and protected with rubber cement. Next, holes are drilled into the interior of the stone. Then nylon rods are inserted in alignment with the two fragments to be connected. Finally, the surface is coated with a moisture-retardant adhesive and the pieces joined. The excess rubber cement is easily removed.



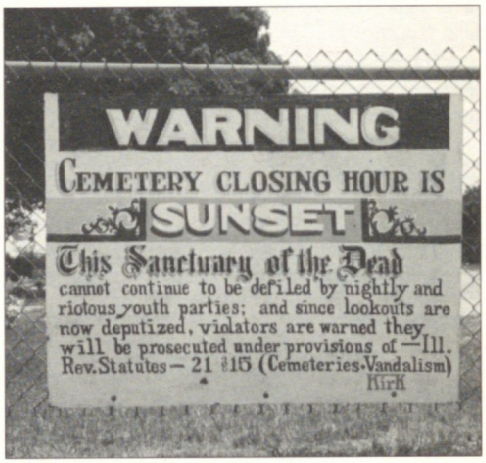
Left: The upper half of this marble tombstone snapped off at the bottom of the word died. Its repair, almost imperceptible, was accomplished with glue. Above: A close-up of the repair. Careful application of adhesives is necessary to avoid running and staining.

Left: Fallen markers are a common site in graveyards, but there is disagreement over whether tombstones should be set upright or left on the ground. Below left: Roberts Cemetery Prairie in Montgomery County. Burning of vegetation at cemeteries requires extreme care since smoke and flames stain stones, and the extreme heat causes them to flake and crack. (Photo courtesy Don McFall, Illinois Department of Conservation)

Other repairs and maintenance tasks are simpler. You may want to remove vines clinging to headstones because they infiltrate the interior of the stone. With a weed trimmer, cut close to the ground and remove the roots. When the vines dry, remove them from the tombstone. There is some controversy on the affects of removing the vine, which may lead to cracks that weaken the stone.

Removing debris from tombstones is a simple task. Careful scrubbing with water and a natural-bristle brush will remove most dirt and soil. Caution must be taken with older stones that have lost their polish to years of weathering.

Lichen, moss, and algae can be removed with a mixture of ammonia and water. Spray the mixture on and work it into the surface using a natural brush. Sandblasting tombstones should never be undertaken, since the pressure is too high to clean them without causing damage.


WARNING
CEMETERY CLOSING HOUR IS
SUNSET
This Sanctuary of the Dead
cannot continue to be defiled by nightly and riotous youth parties; and since lookouts are now deputized, violators are warned they will be prosecuted under provisions of—Ill. Rev. Statutes—21 #15 (Cemeteries-Vandalism)
Kirk

A warning sign at a Sangamon County cemetery cites Illinois laws applicable to cemetery vandalism.

Routine pruning of trees and shrubs, weeding, and lawnmowing are important first steps in cemetery maintenance. Although you will want to remove trash, fallen limbs, and obstructions, do not move any stone or rock without first carefully examining it since it may be a footstone. Check at the cemetery's periphery for burial sites. Traditionally, the centrally located lots were expensive and well marked; the ones skirting the edge were reserved for the less affluent and paupers.

Careful weeding is important. Chemicals should be carefully applied to avoid staining or promoting further stone deterioration. You can trim closely to a stone with a weed trimmer without damaging the stone. Lawn mowers are useful, but a guard should be placed on the blades to prevent scratching or chipping of lawn-type or fallen monuments.

Vandalism

Many Illinoisans are concerned about vandalism and cemetery neglect. Constructing a new fence or repairing an old one will keep animals at bay and may discourage vandalism. Use an open-weave material for your fence such as barbed wire, chain link, or rails. Obstructing the view of a graveyard with stone or brick walls may only conceal vandals and vandalism. Cemetery

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

Old State Capitol • Springfield, Illinois 62701

County_____

ILLINOIS CEMETERY SURVEY

The purpose of this survey is to locate statewide cemeteries, so that the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency can begin to develop a guide book to Illinois cemeteries. Any information concerning people important to state history and/or specific problems concerning cemeteries, please add explanations to survey. When completed, please mail to: Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, Cemetery Project, Old State Capitol, Springfield, 62701.

Name, Address & Phone No. of recorder _____

Date recorded_____

Name or names of cemetery _____

Location: _____

(County, Township, City, Town, Community)

Special directions to site: (County road numbers, 3 ¼ sections)_____

_____

_____

Owner: Public:____ Municipal____ County____ State____Federal____Township

Private:____ Family____ Church(denomination_____)____ Fraternal____ Other_____

Burial population: (ethnic composition, explain)_____

_____

Accessibility to the public: ____unrestricted ____restricted, for permission to visit contact: _____

_____

Access into cemetery: ____by foot ____by car

Terrain: ____level ____hilly-moderate ____hilly-steep

Bounded by: ____fence ____wall ____hedge ____other _____

Condition: ____well maintained ____poorly maintained ____overgrown, easily identifiable ____overgrown, not identifiable ____not identifiable as a burial site, but known to exist through tradition or other means (source of documentation) _____

_____

Approximate size of cemetery: _____ft. × _____ft.; _____Acres

Historical background: For example, are there important individuals of state history buried there? _____

Is the cemetery in its original location or moved? Are the markers in their original locations or rearranged? Has the cemetery been documented before, and if so, when? And where? Are there unusual features or historical incidents which are of interest? Are there architectural features and/or distinctive monuments?_____

_____

_____

_____

Gravestones

Approximate number of markers:_____

Approximate number of burials:_____

Approximate number of markers with burial dates from: ____18th century ____19th century ____20th century

Age: ____earliest date ____most recent date

Materials of which markers are made, approximate number of markers of each material: ____slate ____marble ____granite ____sandstone ____fieldstone ____other, (ex. wood, metal)

Decorative carvings on the markers: ____skulls ____faces ____urns and/or willows ____other(s) Explain: _____

_____

Conditions of the markers: (give number) ____inscriptions readable ____badly tilted stones ____fragments on ground ____broken but standing ____damaged surfaces

Any restoration efforts provided (ex. metal supports, enclosed in concrete, repaired w/adhesive) Explain:_____

_____

_____

_____

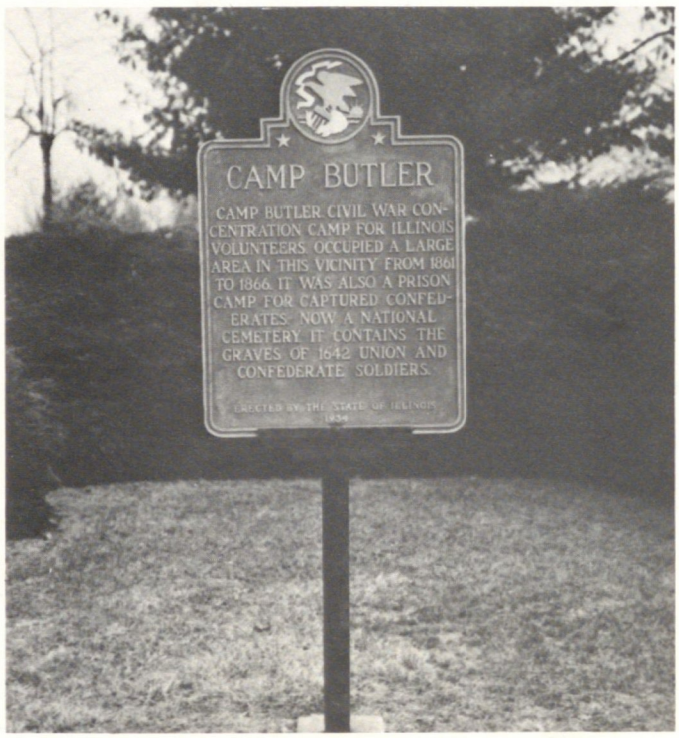
This form may be photocopied for your convenience, or write for more surveys at the above address. The back of this form may be used for explanations and/or sketch maps.

The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency undertook a survey of Illinois cemeteries in 1987. This is the form used to gather information for that survey, called the Illinois Cemetery Project.

Above: Cemeteries provide a unique view of our history and culture. The motifs on these three tombstones—lamb, open Bible with upward pointing finger, and willow tree—were common engravings on nineteenth-century markers. Below: This historical marker at Camp Butler National Cemetery was erected through the Illinois State Historical Society's historical markers program.

vandalism is a Class C misdemeanor and under Illinois law is punishable by a $500 fine and thirty days in jail.

Signs are helpful, informing visitors of cemetery hours, facilities, and rules. Some cemeteries post signs informing people of the consequences if they violate cemetery regulations. Well maintained grounds and legible signs indicate that the cemetery authority is dedicated to preserving a respectable environment.


CAMP BUTLER
CAMP BUTLER CIVIL WAR CONCENTRATION CAMP FOR ILLINOIS VOLUNTEERS OCCUPIED A LARGE AREA IN THIS VICINITY FROM 1861 TO 1866. IT WAS ALSO A PRISON CAMP FOR CAPTURED CONFEDERATES. NOW A NATIONAL CEMETERY IT CONTAINS THE GRAVES OF 1642 UNION AND CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS.

Developing Support for Your Project

How can you encourage volunteers and increase public awareness? First, contact your local historical or genealogical society, which may have inventoried each marker. Those records would indicate which headstones were visible when the inventory was made. Research into cemetery records and obituary notices will provide clues to rediscovering lost stones. A local civic group or a youth organization—for example a local Boy Scout or Girl Scout troop—may contribute volunteers to maintain a cemetery. Volunteers must be properly trained in the correct and sometimes tedious task of uncovering markers. You may find that volunteers develop enthusiasm for other aspects of an area's history.

Contact local television and radio stations and your community service department. They may be willing to give your recruitment effort a boost with some free publicity. Public support can also be generated by the Illinois State Historical Society's markers program. That program oversees the erection of historical markers to memorialize an event or person. The markers program may involve your local historical or genealogical society, civic group, or anyone interested in the area's history.

Once equipped with the proper tools and an understanding of burial grounds, one has the rudimentary knowledge to proceed with a cemetery's restoration. Whatever the reason for restoring a cemetery, workers are preserving a part of the state's cultural fabric. Documenting and interpreting a cemetery's existence and appearance adds much to our understanding of the history of Illinois and its people.

For Further Reading

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Abandoned or neglected cemeteries can be reclaimed from brush and dirt, but it takes hard work and knowledge of appropriate repair techniques.

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

Old State Capitol • Springfield • 62701

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